



City of Glendale Case Study



City Website Proves Central to Rumor Control, Citizen Engagement

When Tom Lorenz, a 30-year police veteran and former SWAT team leader, assumed the top communications job in the City of Glendale, California, he drew on his experience in community relations, conflict resolution and crisis intervention to lead the team that mapped out plans for a new website.

The Problem: A Disjointed, Non-Interactive Website

Lorenz and members of Glendale's Information Services Department (ISD) recognized the power of a city website to build community support and maintain calm in the face of hostility and misinformation. However, Glendale, located on the outskirts of Los Angeles with a population of 200,000, had a website that lacked the interactive capabilities and advanced technology needed to engage its tech-savvy population. The site could not link to social media and appeared disjointed because the webpage of each of the City's 14 departments had its own look and feel.

"In local government you have Police, Fire, Public Works, Parks and Rec, and everything in between," said Lorenz. "The question is not if something will go wrong, it's when something will go wrong. When it does, the trolls of the world want a reaction. But if you're proactive, and make your website a trusted source, people will turn to it when hot-button issues arise and often become some of your strongest ambassadors."

Website Becomes Proactive Information Source

After a competitive bidding process, led by the ISD team, Glendale chose to partner with the online government experts at Vision Internet to develop a new site for the City. Launched in 2014, Glendale's new website, www.glendaleca.gov, has the advanced content management system and responsive design the City needs to bring proactive government to the people it serves. Now citizens can access up-to-the-minute information in a format that fits any mobile device. And its social media connections, via Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, make it a hub for community engagement. In addition, emergency flash pages have been developed for instant posting to the site's homepage.

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Director of Communications
and Community Relations
City of Glendale



Increasing Engagement, Improving User Experience

Within hours of the City's first Vision Internet flash page activation in 2014, hundreds of new followers joined Glendale's social media platforms and that trend continues today.

Clearly, being nimble has its benefits. With Vision Internet's easy-to-use content management system, vision-CMS™, representatives from each department can upload information to their own page, eliminating the bottleneck that could arise when the City's ISD team had to manage the entire site. Now, the site's content is more up-to-date, and built-in controls ensure that the graphic design, which visually connects department pages throughout the site, remains consistent.

Rumor Page Creates "Village of Informed Citizens"

Proactive communication is integral to Glendale's goal to create a "village of informed citizens" who can ultimately serve as ambassadors to share important news. And, to help set the record straight in the event that misinformation begins to spread throughout the City, Lorenz and the ISD team created a website Rumor Page, to give people more information and quickly dispel rumors when they pop up.

"It didn't take long to prove its worth."

In 2014, with California facing one of the most severe droughts on record, Glendale, like most cities across the state, was in the process of developing tighter water conservation measures. But a few cities that lagged behind were still treating brown lawns as a misdemeanor. When a well-read newspaper incorrectly reported that Glendale had issued a citation to a homeowner for not keeping their lawn green (when in reality it was another town with a similar name) hostile e-mails and negative comments on social media platforms began to appear and a number of television stations started to call. Glendale instantly activated its rumor management plan.

"We immediately turned to our website Rumor Page to get the facts out," said Lorenz. "Our website allowed us to send the correct information to our community and the media in real time. As a result, the newspaper corrected the story, and within an hour the whole thing was over."

Glendale's Rumor Page, which regularly distinguishes fact from rumor, is now one of the top pages viewed on the site. Information is posted as soon as an incident arises to share the facts and links to supporting documents that provide additional information.

To maintain user loyalty and credibility, Glendale also keeps its social media posts smart, sharp and short... always offering a link to a landing page on the website where people can get more information.

Connecting Departments, Empowering Employees

Lorenz said that City employees also are a key part of Glendale's communications plan. "In the past, when we wanted to educate the public on what the City was doing, we'd often fail to educate our own employees first," he said. "Now making sure all 1,600 City employees are informed is a top priority. So if residents ask a gardener in the Parks Department or a parking attendant in a City lot why the street's closed, he or she can tell them."

In the glove box of every city vehicle is a pad of 3x5-inch cards that give MyGlendale emergency information, and direct people to the City website's URL for more detail and updates. The pads are in offices, on counters in city buildings, and in every city vehicle from ambulances to gardening trucks. When someone asks a utility worker what's going on, the worker can briefly explain, then offer a card as a resource for more information.

"In the old days, City employees were siloed, and most of them didn't know what other departments were doing," Lorenz added. "Now they are educated on what's happening in the City as a whole, and support each other. The same is true for our citizens. Our website is helping to unite the city."